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IGNACY NASALSKI
Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie

Unwanted Literature. A Case of the Moroccan Writer Muḥammad Šukrī

Abstract

The history of books that were rejected, condemned, banned or censored in various parts of the world for political, social, religious or sexual reasons is very long. Whereas, however, people in the West have learned to value controversial literature despite its contentious or provocative nature, the societies in the Middle East still have problems with accepting certain sorts of literary works. There are many publications in the Arab World that sum up to a category I call *unwanted literature* because the conservative society in which they were produced doesn't want to accept them as their own heritage. One of the most recent and striking examples of such divergence of opinion between the Western and Eastern readers are the works of the Moroccan author Mohamed Choukri and especially his autobiography *al-Ḫubz al-Ḥāfī* published in 1973 in English translation by Paul Bowles as *For Bread Alone* long before the Arabic version could appear.

Keywords: Mohamed Choukri, Paul Bowles, *For Bread Alone*, *Arabian Nights*, unwanted literature, censorship, banned books, Morocco, Tangier, autobiography.

As we know literature is, apart from all its functions, a means for creating and maintaining social identity, be it religious, ethnic or national. Books that are considered to be founding for a culture and important for a society are chosen on the basis of different criteria such as their content, their message, their literary and linguistic values. Sometimes the books are appraised for only some reasons but not for others. When all those criteria meet altogether we tend to speak about masterpieces. And in cases of what can be called universality – i.e. when a literary work is of outstanding quality and its subject concerns values important for all people regardless their culture – we speak of masterpieces of world literature.

Arabian Nights

Sometimes the appraisals of a literary work diverge so much that a particular piece of writing judged as a universal masterpiece is deemed within the respective culture a mediocre achievement at best, if not a worthless drivel. The most spectacular example of such a divergence is the collection of stories known in English as *One Thousand and One Night* (Arabic: *Alf Layla wa-Layla*; Persian: *Hezār-o Yak Šab*) or simply – since the linguistic original is written in Arabic and most of the events take place within the Arabic cultural context – *Arabian Nights*. Although the stories are mostly of Indian and Persian origin – the three main protagonists: Shahrazad (Čehrāzād), Shahrijar (Šahrīār), Danizad (Dīnīzād or Dīnarzād) bear for instance Iranian names[1] – some of them existed most probably before the ninth century C.E. and others may date back even further to the Mesopotamian or ancient Egyptian cultures [ENA XXIII]. The Muslim culture of the Middle Ages as found in Baghdad or Cairo also contributed to the text so that "each 'stratum' corresponds to a deposit of stories reflecting the influence on the Nights of a given society and geographical locale during a particular historical period" [EAL 69]. The stories were eventually adapted and translated into Arabic as early as in the ninth century and then compiled into a single work with a famous frame story about Shehrezad and some thousand other minor or marginal tales interwoven into it, in many cases as a story within a story.

In Western cultures the *Arabian Nights* are considered one of the greatest literary accomplishments in human history.[2] The influence of the book – or to be precise of the several volumes of the book – on world literature, music and art is immense.

> No other work of fiction of non-Western origin has had a greater impact on Western culture than the *Arabian Nights*. Besides suppling pleasant entertainment to generations of readers and listeners, right up to the present the work has been an inexhaustible mine of inspiration for all kinds of creative activities. At the same time, it has contributed decisively to the West's perception of the "Orient" as the essential Other and, hence, to the West's definition of its own cultural identity [ANE XXIII].

In fact it is rather hard to find artists who were not influenced in one way or another by the "Nights"[3], even in such distant culture as Japanese.[4] However

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[1] *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (www.iranicaonline.org/articles/alf-layla-wa-layla).

[2] And yet, there were times when the "Arabian Nights" were viewed with disfavor and even banned in the West [BB-Se 21], mostly because of their explicit sexual content rendered especially by Richard Burton, who translated the book, in his own words, "as the Arab would have written in English". His translation published between 1886-1888 contained "exuberant, earthy, and unembarrassed tales of lust, lesbianism, sodomy, bestiality, male transvestism, pederasty, incest, and sexual mutilation. His sexually willing slave girls, nubile virgins, omnipresent eunuchs, lecherous old women, and wineinduced lust entice the reader. Although most of the descriptions of sexual behavior are tastefully presented with euphemisms, the sexual nature of the actions is clear" [BB-Se 21].

[3] R. Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, Tauris Parke Paperbacks, London 2005, p. 290–291; R. Irwin, *Preface to: The Arabian Nights and Orientalism. Perspectives from East and West*, eds. Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio, London 2006, p. IX–X.

[4] T. Nishio, *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism from a Japanese Perspective* [in:] *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism. Perspectives from East and West*, eds. Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio, London

contrary to the Western views the *Arabian Nights* have never been particularly treasured in the Arab or Muslim world. Fiction had a low cultural status compared with poetry and tales like *Arabian Nights* that were written in the language close to colloquial Arabic were dismissed as *ḫurāfāt*, i.e. fantasies fit only for entertaining women and children. Even today the "Thousand and One Nights" are regularly denounced – with the exception of a few writers and academics – not only as improbable, childish, badly written, but also as vulgar and obscene because they contain sexually explicit content.

> In most educated circles of Arab society the *Alf layla* was until recently considered too disreputable to be a worthy model for imitation or literary inspiration. Part of this disregard stemmed from its level of diction, an uneven blend of colloquial vulgarisms, ornamental *saj'* and classicizing *fuṣḥā* (sometimes ungrammatically rendered). In polite circles retelling *Alf layla* tales in any form might also have caused embarrassment to one's vocational standing and social rank: the learned courtier would not have wanted to be confused with the common *ḥakawatī* who harangued marketplace crowds with his stories; the *Alf layla* was the province of those who told tales for a living [EAL 75].

Things changed a little in the twentieth century. Influenced by the Western admiration for the stories some Muslim intellectuals started to re-evaluate their cultural heritage and common prejudices. Several eminent Arab authors like Taha Ḥusayn, Yaḥyā aṭ-Ṭāhir ʿAbd Allāh and Nağīb Maḥfūẓ integrated various layers of the stories into their own works [EAL 75–76]. However both in the Arab as well as in the Iranian world the work remains to a large extent ignored.

Unwanted Books

The history of books that were rejected, condemned, banned or censored in various parts of the world for political [BB-P], social [BB-So], religious [BB-R] or sexual [BB-Se] reasons is as long as the list itself which includes such world masterpieces as Ovid's *The Art of love*", Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, Baudelaire *Les fleurs du mal* or Joyce's *Ulysses*. There is virtually no culture free from certain forms of censorship since every society needs to regulate informational processes that are crucial for its integrity and identity. Whereas people in the West who have undergone developments of modernity have learned to value controversial literature despite its critical or provocative content, the societies in the Middle East who have not shared these mental and cultural experiences still have problems with accepting certain sorts of literary works. Apart from the well-known example of Salman Rushdie's novel *Satanic Verses* which remains banned for alleged blasphemy against Islam in many Muslim countries (Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Iran, Kenya, Kuwait, Liberia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, Senegal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand), the various forms of censorship in Arab Countries

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2006, p. 154–167; H. Sugita, *The Arabian Nights in Modern Japan: A Brief Historical Sketch* [in:] *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism. Perspectives from East and West*, eds. Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio, London 2006, p. 116–153.

comprise more than 650 different books and papers ranging from novels, academic articles to doctoral dissertations, conference papers and articles in encyclopedias in several languages other than Arabic published since 1960.[5] Some authors and works that were once censored for political or social reasons enjoy today certain popularity among their readers (e.g. Sunʿallāh Ibrāhīm *Tilka r-rāʾiḥa*, 1966;[6] various poems by the Iraqi poet ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayāti; written in French *Le Passé simple* by the Moroccan author Driss Chraibi (Idrīs aš-Šarāybī), 1954), other works mainly those dealing with the themes of religion or containing references to various forms of sexuality are denounced and rejected by ordinary people and/or intellectuals. These are works like *al-ʿAṭaš* (*La Soif*) by the Algerian writer Āsyā Ğabār (1957); *Walīma li-aʿšāb al-baḥr* by the Syrian author Ḥaydar Ḥaydar (1983) or *Baʿīdan ʿan al-miʾḍana* by the Egyptian Alīfa Rifʿat (1983). Although translated into many foreign languages[7] and deemed as significant artistic and social achievements they remain marginalized and belong together with the *Arabian Nights* to a category that can be called unwanted literature because the conservative society in which they were produced doesn't want to accept them as their own heritage.

Mohamed Choukri and the Unwanted Realism

One of the most remarkable contemporary examples of such unwanted literature are the works of the probably best-known and internationally acclaimed Moroccan author Mohamed Choukri (Muḥammad Šukrī): first and foremost the extraordinary fictionalized autobiography *al-Ḫubz al-Ḥāfī* (introduced to Western audiences by the American writer Paul Bowles as "For Bread Alone" in 1973 long before the Arabic version could appear) and to the lesser extent the subsequent continuation of this first book *aš-Šuṭṭār*, *Streetwise* 1992 (also known as *Zaman al-aḫṭāʾ*, *A Time of Errors*) and *Wuǧūh*, *Faces* (1996).

Mohamed Choukri (1935–2003) was a Moroccan author and novelist of Berber origin. He was raised in an extremely poor rural family. At the age of 11 he ran away from his tyrannical father whom he accused of murdering his younger brother out of poverty. He became a homeless child living in Tangier and survived thanks to a variety of jobs: he was a petty burglar, an occasional smuggler, a male prostitute. He experienced extreme misery, violence, drug abuse. His whole life was surrounded by prostitutes, thieves, smugglers.[8] He learned to read and write when he was 20 and was so receptive and diligent that he even became later a schoolteacher. As Paul Bowles writes in the foreword to his translation of Choukri's autobiography:

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[5] M.A. Nsouli, L.I. Meho, *Censorship in the Arab World: An Annotated Bibliography*, Lanham, MD, 2006.

[6] Translated into English as *That Smell* or *That Smell of It* and published 1971.

[7] English translations are respectively: Assia Djebar *The Mischief*, Haidar Haidar *A Feast for the Seaweeds* (1983), Alifa Rifaat *Distant view of a Minaret and other Stories* (1983).

[8] B. Sigge, *Entbehrung und Lebenskampf. Die Autobiographie des marokkanischen Autors Mohamed Choukri*, Berlin 1997.

> Choukri grew up under conditions of poverty excessive even for Morocco. Eight of his brother and sisters died of malnutrition and neglect. Another brother was killed outright by Choukri's father in an access of hunger and desperation. Mohamed and one or two other managed to survive, even under these worst possible circumstances. *For Bread Alone* records his struggle for survival, up to the time the young man made the resolve to become literate. To have taken and implemented such a decision at the age of twenty is unusual. To have passed in the space of five years from learning the letters of the alphabet to writing poems and stories is even more unexpected.[9]

Tangier in which Choukri spent most of his adult life was at that time – i.e. in the '50s and '60s – a cosmopolitan city. He met and befriended there such famous authors as Jean Genet, Tennessee Williams and Paul Bowles, people who changed his life. Bowles who had been living in Morocco since 1947 and had turned away from his own writing after his wife's death in 1957 undertook a number of projects involving the transcription and translation into English of oral narratives by Moroccan storytellers. At the time when the both met together Choukri was working on his own biography but did not feel sufficiently established as a writer so Bowles offered his help and published the story in 1973 under the title "For Bread Alone". This is what Paul Bowles writes about the translation in the foreword to the book:

> Because I have translated several books from the Arabic I want to make a clear differentiation between the earlier volumes and the present work. The other books were spoken onto tape and the words were in the colloquial Arabic called Maghrebi. *For Bread Alone* is a manuscript, written in classical Arabic, a language I do not know. The author had to reduce it first to Moroccan Arabic for me. Then we use Spanish and French for ascertaining shades of meaning. Although exact, the translation is far from literal.[10]

The novel *al-Ḫubz al-Ḥāfī* is an exceptional piece of art. It is a key novel not only in the Moroccan but also in the Arabic literature. It is characterized by extreme frankness and detail and that it why it has been especially condemned not only by religious and conservative forces in Morocco and in other Arab countries but also by many literary critics and scholars who called the book obscene and pornographic and claimed it uses sex as a shock instrument. In fact Choukri writes about his sexual and homosexual experiences, even about animal sex, but this is not a book about sexuality. It is an autobiography in which the protagonist takes his first steps into maturity, independence, self-esteem and masculinity.[11] It is a book filled with pain, despair and hope. The Arabic title *al-Ḫubz al-Ḥāfī* means "bare bread", i.e. eaten by itself as a meal and it alludes to the book's main theme: hunger. Hunger for food, for love, for physical closeness, for respect, and for freedom.

Most Western literary scholars perceive the novel as an important and powerful text that has been already translated into some 40 languages. The above mentioned famous American playwright Tennessee Williams described it as "A true document of human desperation, shattering in its impact".[12] One of the few Arabic

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[9] M. Choukri, *For Bread Alone. Translated and Introduced by Paul Bowles*, London 1973, p. 6.

[10] Ibid., p. 5.

[11] Ch. Civantos, *Literacy, Sexuality and the Literary in the Self-Inscription of* Muḥammad Shukrī, "Middle Eastern Literature" 2006, no 9(1), p. 23–45.

[12] M. Gewaily, *Explication and Implication in the English Translation of Mohamed Choukri's "For Bread Alone": Linguistic and Pragmatic Losses*, Ann Arbour 2007, p. 9.

literary scholars who understood the true value of the novel was the Egyptian scholar Samia Mehrez who called it "a very moving and candid tale of an illiterate Moroccan child of the underclass who accedes to literacy at age 20 and is able to weave the appalling conditions of his life history into a mesmerizing text".[13] Remarkably, these words come from a Professor of the American University of Cairo (AUC) who included the book into her university curriculum in 1998, but the novel was withdrawn from it[14] after many complaints from students who found the book obscene and repulsive. Their outraged parents wrote in a letter to the Minister of Higher Education:

> This story is far from the principles of Arabic literature, he [Choukri] is talking about his dirty life that is of no interest to anybody. We believe that what has been written in some of the chapters is enough to corrupt a whole generation. […] [Please] protect our children and the children of the Egyptian and Arab Societies from such persons who are attacking the innocence of our new generations. Do not leave the teacher to control and destroy the minds of our children [READING 78].

The minister himself was of similar opinion and said that the book was pornographic and it "contained indecency".[15] "Egypt allows free thinking but rejects violations of its values and traditions" he explained. One lawmaker, Ahmed Sheha, called the book so "filthy that it should only be read in pubs and brothels". The custodians of morality called it an invitation to promiscuity and lewdness and the whole commotion at the AUC ended only when the President Mubarak intervened.

In spite of the international success Choukri was prevented from publishing his autobiography for many years. The Arabic version – can we call it original? – was rejected by several publishers in the Arab world and it was not printed until 1982 at the author's expense.[16] Even after it was finally published the Arabic version was initially censored for what was perceived as pornographic content, description of drug abuse, violence and a searing portrayal of social reality. It was

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[13] S. Mehrez, *Egypt's Culture Wars. Politics and Practice*, London 2008, p. 235.

[14] Interestingly this was done "In addition to the perennially contraband text of *The Thousand And One Nights*" […] and "Abdullah al-Nadim's *al-Masamir* (1898; *The Nails*) and Khalil Gibran's masterpiece *The Prophet*. […] What is especially remarkable about this fact is that the books in question had been written or published much earlier and had been available in Egypt for decades. This is as true of Mahfouz's *Awlad Haratina* (1959; *Children of Gebelawi*, 1981; *Children of Our Alley*, 1996) and the Arabic translation of Gibran's *The Prophet* (1966) as it is of Mohamed Choukri's *al-Khubz al-Hafi* (1982; *For Bread Alone*, 1982) and Haydar Haydar's *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* (1983; *A Banquet for the Seaweed*). Al-Nadim's work, of course, has been in existence for over a century and *The Arabian Nights* for nearly a millennium" [M. Siddiq, *Arab Culture, Identity and the Novel. Genre, Identity, and Agency in Egyptian Fiction*, London 2007, p. 2].

[15] M. Siddiq, op. cit., p. 204.

[16] Since the Spanish version appeared at the same time, this unique way of publishing has led some scholars to the conclusion that it presents "an interesting (if unwilling) example of the polyglottism of many former colonies (Morocco is bilingual, Tangiers trilingual – Arabic, French and Spanish)" [J.L.-P. Casellas, *Form of Exile in the Narrative of Mohamed Choukri and Joycce's Portrait* [in:] *Borderlands: Negotiating Boundaries in Post-colonial Writing*, ed. M. Reif-Hülser, Amsterdam 1999, p. 205].

also dismissed by many critics as nonliterary writing.[17] The censorship ended in 2000 when *al-Ḫubz al-Ḥāfī* was finally published officially in Morocco. And yet the book is still banned in many other Arab countries and in almost all of them it remains ignored by all social classes contributing to the long list of unwanted literature.

To fully understand the literary value of the book, in spite of its coarse language, one should read it in its entirety. However, I would like to present here a few controversial and disturbing passages in order to let the reader understand the uproar on the one hand and to make it clear that it is precisely these elements that make the book so unique on the other. I offer in the following a comparison between the English precursor rendered by Paul Bowles[18] and the Arabic text[19] in my unembellished translation. One can easily notice that the Bowles' version, although moving, is flowing, elegant and rather restrained, whereas the Arabic text is much simpler, dry and crude, it blends the past and present tense, its style is unsophisticated and rough, and yet the text is much more dramatic and much more distressing.

There are, however, some significant differences between the both editions. The English text varies more or less from the Arabic one in syntax, in lexis and in the composition. Some parts are missing and some are added.

Choukri 1973	Šukrī 1982
One afternoon I could not stop crying. I was hungry. I had sucked my fingers so much that the idea of doing it again made me sick to my stomach. My mother kept telling me: Be quiet. Tomorrow were leaving for Tangier. There's all the bread you want there. You won't be crying for bread any more, once we get to Tangier. My little brother Abdelqader was too sick to cry as I did. Look at your little brother, she told me. See how he is. Why can't you be like him? I stare at his pallid face and his sunken eyes and stop crying. But after a few moments I forget to be inspired by his silence, and begin once more to cry. When my father came in I was sobbing, and repeating the word *bread* over and over. Bread. Bread. Bread. Bread. Then he began to slap and kick me, crying: Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! If you're hungry, eat your mother s heart. I felt myself lifted into the air, and he went on kicking me until his leg was tired.	One afternoon I cannot stop crying. I feel pain from hunger. I suck my fingers again and again. I vomit but only threads of saliva come out of my mouth. My mother tells me once in a while: – Be quiet. We're leaving for Tangier. There a lot of bread. You won't be crying for bread any more, once we get to Tangier. People eat themselves fill there. My brother Abd al-Qader does not cry. My mother says: – Look at your brother. He doesn't cry. And you do. I look at his pallid face and his sunken eyes and stop crying. After a while I forget the patience I draw on him. My father came in. He found me cry over bread. He began to kick and hit me. – Shut up, shut up, shut up, eat your mother's heart, you son of the bitch. He lifted me into the air and threw to the floor. He kept kicking until his legs were tired and I wetted my pants. [p. 9–10]

[17] F.J. Ghazoul, B. Harlow, *The View from Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature*, Cairo 1994, p. 226.

[18] M. Choukri, op. cit.

[19] M. Šukrī, *al-Ḫubz al-ḥāfī*, Bayrūt 1982.

[Lacking in Bowles' translation]	From time to time my father stays away for couple of days. When he's back, he quarrels with my mother. In most cases he hits her till she's bleeding. And yet at night I can hear them laugh and moan with pleasure in their bed. I started to understand what they were doing. They sleep naked and cuddle with each other. So this is how they make it up. When I grow up I will have a wife. I will beat her and humiliate her during the day and then at night I will make it up with her naked, cuddling with her. This is really nice and amusing this game between a man and a woman. [p. 29]
Some nights I slept on a bench in the cafe. Other times it was at the Spanish bakery nearby. One night I watched the workers amuse themselves. Five or six of them took hold of Yazidi the baker and got him to the floor. They gagged him with a handkerchief so he could not bite them. Then one of them let down his trousers and, squatting over Yazidi, began to rub his buttocks, his scrotum and his sex against Yazidis nose. Since I was afraid they might do the same thing to me, I decided to get out of the bakery quickly. The dangers of the streets on the way home were preferable, even though the distance seemed great at night when it was dark, and I was frightened.	Some nights I sleep in the café on a bench. Other times I sleep at the Spanish bakery next to the café. One night I watched them amuse themselves. Five or six of them took hold of Yazidi the baker and got him to the floor. They gagged him with a piece of cloth so he could not bite. One of them let down his trousers, rubbed his buttocks, penis and scrotum against Yazidi's nose. Is this the way people amuse themselves? I got out of the bakery afraid the same thing that happened to Yazidi or even worst could happen to me. I preferred the dangers of the streets on the way home. I was risking. I have heard a lot about rapes of girls and boys. The way home was dark and frightening at night. [p. 31]
Each day the sight of certain living creatures produced great excitement in me: hens, goats, dogs and calves. Many hens died as a result of my experiments. I would have to muzzle a dog, or tie up a calf, but there was no need to take such precautions with a goat or a hen, and these were more satisfactory. I began to have pains in my chest, and mentioned them. They told me: You're growing up, that's all. I have a disturbing sensation in my nipples and in my sex, and when I squeeze the milk out of my sex, I feel as if I were being torn to pieces inside my body.	My sexual desire inflames me every day. A hen, a goat, a bitch, a cow. These were my women. I make a punctured in a sieve and put it on the bitch's head, I bind the cow. And the hen and the goat? Who is afraid of them? My chest aches me. I asked the grown-ups about it. They said this is pubescence. My nipples ache me when I have erection. I masturbate imaging all prohibited and permitted bodies. Until I eject liquid resembling mucus and feel pain like an inner wound inside of my penis. [p. 33]

A little girl named Mounat pulled up her dress, crouched, and made water. She did not know I was watching. I wondered why her pink thing had no hairs around it. It was not pretty when she squatted down: it was as ugly as a toothless old mouth. And I saw our neighbour Saida changing her clothes. Her belly sticks out, not something you would want to touch. Her breasts are flabby. So much hanging flesh disgusts me. Things became clearer. I begin to make comparisons between beautiful things and ugly ones. It seemed to me that unless women had bodies like Asiyas, they were ugly. I am bothered every day by my sex. I scratch it slowly with my fingers as if it were a pimple not yet ready to burst. Then it fills and grows hard, until it is sweating and panting. Unless I reach pleasure during my reverie, I feel pain like two stones. I conjure up the picture of Asiyas body. Never have I seen anything so lovely and desirable. I kiss her, suck her breasts, and she caresses me with her hands and her lips. I imagine her, I keep imagining her, I maintain her picture in the dream by an effort of will, until the liquid is forced out and I disappear into delight.	I was lying stretched under a tree when I saw the little girl Mona rise her skirt. I took care that I can see her and she cannot see me. Why doesn't she have any fluff on her pink thing? Her pink thing is ugly when she bends. It's like a mouth without teeth, ugly thing. I went to our neighbor's house to get something for my mother. I came in when she was changing her underwear. Her belly was bulging and ugly. Her breasts were flabby. Her body was slouchy. If women's bodies are like this and not like the one of Asiya, then they are ugly, ugly, ugly! My penis titillates me every day. I nurse it with my fingers like I nurse a painful pimple waiting until it produces pus. It grows up. It's pleasurable. It straightens up bit by bit until it turns red, until it is sweating and panting. I became preoccupied with it alone. I feel pain in the testicles if it doesn't end in ejaculation. I conjure up the picture of Asiya's body. I kiss her in my phantasy, she lets me touch her breasts, caresses me with her hand and her lips. [The rest is absent in the Arabic text] [p. 35]
When night came, I crept into the stall where the cows slept. I made one of them stand up, and I patted her head and smoothed her hide. Then I rubbed her udder, and she let me suck on it. After three days of fear and watchfulness in the lanes and alleys of the quarter, and three nights of milk-sucking in the security of the stable, I fell into the trap my father had set for me. The neighbours had to break the bolt on our front door in order to deliver me and my mother from the blows of his military belt. My body was covered with bleeding welts, and one of her eyes was swollen shut. It was many nights before I could find a comfortable position to sleep in. I longed to be able to sleep in the air. My wounds hurt, my bones ache, and I can feel the fever burning in my head.	At night I crept into a barn where the cows are. I made a Dutch cow stand up. I caressed her. I played with her udder. She let me suck on it. I hang around during the day in the district. I spend the nighttime in the stable. In the third night I fell into the trap my father had set for me with some guys from the neighborhood whom he promised a reward. Two neighbors broke the bolt on our house's door to rescue me and my mother. He was battering us with his military belt. My whole body is covered with blood. My mother's eye is swollen. It was many nights before I found a way to sleep. I wished I could sleep in the air. [p. 36]

The tree looked like a woman, only it was without legs, and its branches took the place of a head. I looked for a smaller tree, and found it, smooth and bright. I discovered that when I put my arms around it, they met at the back. I cut the outline of a woman on the trunk, with head and torso, and then I began the creation. For a full week I was busy cutting out two deep holes for the breasts, as well as another. Even deeper one at the meeting of the legs. And so I made the tree woman. Whenever I wanted to amuse myself I fastened an orange into each breast-hole, and sucked on them. Sometimes I substituted apples, so that I could chew pieces out of them. The opening between the thighs had to be lubricated, and then I was able to transfer all the images in my memory to the tree woman.	I imagined the tree was a woman. I looked for another smaller tree. Smooth and beautiful. I put my arms around it and found the trunk fit for them. I drew an outline of a woman on the trunk and started with my creation: you shall have everything a woman has. In a week I cut out in the trunk two holes for the breasts, one for the lips and one between the thighs. A tree-woman. I put two oranges into the holes to suck on them, or two apples to bite on, and one of them into the mouth. In the opening between the thighs I put a rag with cream or oil. I started to transfer beautiful images to the tree-woman. [p. 55–56]
We were on the outskirts of town. Hes a *maricón*. That muchis certain, I thought. He stopped the car in a dark section of the road. The lights of the city sparkled in the distance. He turned on the overhead light. So the short ride ends here. With a caressing movement he runs his hand over my fly. And the other ride begins. Button by button, very slowly, he unfastened the trousers, and my sex felt at his hand, whose warm pressure had made my sex rise up. *Bravo!* he was saying. *Macho bravo!* He began to lick it and touch it with his lips, and at the same time he tickled my crotch with his fingers. When he pulled half of it down his throat, I felt his teeth. And if he bites it? I thought. The idea cooled my enthusiasm. To bring it back, I began to imagine that I was deflowering Asiya in Tetuan. When I finished, he still had me in his mouth.	We were driving to one of outskirts of town. He's queer. No doubt. He stopped the car in a dark place. In a road with many trees. The city with its sparkling lights behind us. He turned on the car lights. So the short ride ends here. He ran his hand over my fly with a gentle move. The actual ride begins. Button by button he unfastened slowly the trousers. He switched on the top light and leaned over my penis. His breath made it warm. He licked it and took half of it into his mouth. He let it out and took it again and my thing started to rise up. I didn't dare to look at his face: – Bravo! Bravo! Macho! He licked it, sucked it, tickled my scrotum with his fingers. I felt his teeth and suddenly he bit it due to his growing passion! To hasten ejaculation I imagined raping Asiya in Tetuan. I discharged in his mouth. He growled for delight like an animal. [p. 106]

What does it mean, that I should be sleeping here in this corner of a family grave? From the tiles and the well-kept plot I can see that the family was a rich one. What does it mean to allow a man sixty or seventy years old to suck on me and then give me fifty pesetas? There must be answers to these questions, but I don't know them yet. The questions come easily, but I am not sure of the answer to any one of them. I thought the meaning of life was in living it.	What does it mean that a man lives and dies? Graves are being taken care of and I sleep on them. Is this the meaning of life? My penis is sold for fifty pesetas. What does it mean? There are many questions but I don't understand fully their meaning. All that I know is that life loves to produce life. [p. 109]

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Abbreviations

ANE. *Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, eds. U. Marzolph, R. van Leeuwen, Santa Barbara et al. 2004.
BB-P. *Banned Book – Literature Supressed on Political Grounds*, ed. N.J. Karolides, New York 2006.
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